

Variations on form (II)

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VARIATIONS ON FORM (II)

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The body of a poem is the continuum through which its life-meaning is expressed. In addition to containing possibilities, it creates them by inhabiting a space (multidimensional, more than liminal) where shared, ongoing transfigurations may become manifest. It is in this space of potentialities that we along with poetry exist.

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Likewise, space and time are "integral events" (Creeley's words regarding form and content), and the body that occupies itself fully shares in their integration through moments of occupying existence. This is what we call synchronicity, manifestation, realization, epiphany, poetry, music, meaning. (From there, we move on into other places, nevertheless changed by the event, accompanied by its echo.)

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Merwin: "A poetic form: the setting down of a way of hearing how poetry happens in words. The words themselves do not make it. At the same time it is testimony of a way of hearing how life happens in time. But time does not make it."

* * *

My friend tells me how he first *sees* his poems, the lines, the image, *then* hears them. I, on the other hand, find that meanings

almost always arrive as music, sympathetic vibrations of the body, hand, mind, and mouth. But I wonder if we are not talking about the same thing here, the difference having only to do with frequencies and our personal sensitivities to them?

* * *

Fare la Vecia

If we could love like these words,

bliss of the lip and lithe
tongue, all utterance awash

in light, Canaletto
without the clouds,

we would pour—lovers' salt lips
to the canthus, those stars—

like a bottled sea
or this day

made wingless
as doves suffering

the stroke,

one griefless shiver feeding
the next.

And we would love San Marco bleeding
the color of sin into beards.

Hushed, this art smooth
as flight, cool

jade, a sky

the only way out. Windows,
frescoes, women hanging clothes,

and men, water,
calling their boats by name.

* * *

John Cage: "If you want to know the truth of the matter, the music I prefer, even to my own or anybody else's is what we are hearing if we are just quiet."

* * *

From Colin McPhee's *A House in Bali*:

Soon Durus had become one of the household, for Pugig had decided he needed a helper. He sang as he polished the silver, and he was forever writing verses for some imaginary *arja* play. These verses were in the strictest classical style, I discovered, although the subject was often a considerable surprise. One day he commemorated in verse an account of an agreeable excursion we had made the day before, complete with the route we had taken, Kesur's bad temper at the blowout he had had to mend, our picnic in the mountains, and the town where we had stopped to buy cigarettes and ice cream. Durus had composed this little poem in the meter of *Durma*, which has seven lines of different length to a verse, and I was amused to find his stanzas coincide exactly, down to the number of syllables and the vowel endings to each line, with the verse by that name as it was

given in Raffles' book on Java, published over a century before.

This is a handsome poem, I said. You must read it.

But instead of reading it he sang it to me, in the chant proper to the meter. Poetry could not be read, it seemed; it must be sung.

One day he returned in triumph from Batuan with a rare text he had discovered in the home of the *klian* in his village. It was a book of recipes and ingredients for the different feast dishes, written in verse. But when I gave it to Made Gria, the *dalang*, to read, he looked at it for some time, and at last finding the stanzas unfamiliar, he said,

I cannot read it, for I do not know the tune.

But never mind the tune; just read the words.

But he only repeated, I can't; I do not know the tune....

* * *

A poem gives itself up to the world in the same way a child wonders at it. Such wonder—such capacity for wonder—is that which transforms us into the unspoken language of arrived at differences. Thus the equation of form and content has more to do with experience than measurement.

* * *

During a recent visit with my four-year-old nephew, I spent some time reading aloud to him many of his favorite books, again and again, as we lay together in a small bed. Of course, he found pleasure and comfort in the established drama of expectation and resolution. But I wondered later if it had not also been the very visceral nature of the shared act that he had enjoyed, the vocal resonance and its charge passing from my chest cavity into his, exciting his body, its cells and imagination.

* * *

Listening, like singing, is an extending of oneself into concord.

* * *

Included in that equation (form and content, shared acts of resonance) is the understanding that it itself does not exist in a vacuum. While it cannot be separated from itself (by virtue of its own understanding), it also cannot be separated from the possibility of another's understanding. In fact, it is an expression of experience that is recognized *through* understanding, and having been understood, recognized. And thus believed, accepted, attended to as truth.

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Also recently, I attended a performance by Kodo. I had seen them about fifteen years before, in the States, and not since. They remain an example of what is holy about the world, the possibilities to be found in the practice of perfecting the expression of some form of truth, a commitment to the individual—collective expressing fundamental and universal equations (earthly and ethereal) in musical languages of joy and full giving.

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Again, McPhee:

I sat watching the concentration of the players. Boys of fourteen, men of twenty or sixty—all gave themselves up to the serious business of rehearsal. The music was rapid, the rhythms intricate. Yet without effort, with eyes closed, or staring out into the night, as though each player were in an isolated world of his own, the men performed their isolated parts with mysterious unity, fell upon the syncopated accents with hair's-breadth precision. I wondered at their natural ease, the almost casual way in which they played. This, I thought, is the way

music was meant to be, blithe, transparent, rejoicing the soul with its eager rhythm and lovely sound. As I listened to the musicians, watched them, I could think only of a flock of birds wheeling in the sky, turning with one accord, now this way, now that, and finally descending to the trees.

* * *

A poem carries its own weight in meaning, nothing more, nothing less.

* * *

Think of Rilke singing. Or the birds themselves spinning into song.

* * *

Java Kingfishers

We gaze down upon the formal earth,
river and field, ricefields and grasses,

and reflect on them, the abundant
thinking of the replicative acts of god.

Just listen to the birds call out.
How else might we distinguish ourselves

in such a landscape, follow our lives
to the source of a place where the mind

patterns itself after a song. Bodily

pleasures? Yes. And here in this house

we have made of earth, we are delivered
to the world on great blue wings, and

wonder, repeatedly, at its foundations.

* * *

And thus I wonder if it is not only more of the natural world we need, but also a magical rearticulation of it, to provide the ground-work, so to speak.

* * *

A poem exists in the fullness of its potential for expression.

* * *

The world as spirit embodied in all forms is an understanding of the imagination that creates us and that we contain. We are its past, present, and future in bodily form desiring. We are its manifestation, and it is precisely our physical nature which allows us to understand this fact. *We are the understanding of our own forms embodied.* And our imagination is the existence of that understanding. It is also its creation. It is body infused with spirit and exists for its own sake. A poem is this same sort of knowing-thing.

* * *

Donald Hall: "Whatever else we may say of a poem we admire, it exists as a sensual body." As does the world in its every incarnation, articulated or not.